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ECCLESIASTES IN THE METRE OF OMAR

ECCLESIASTES

IN THE METRE OF OMAR

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY ESSAY
ON ECCLESIASTES AND
THE RUBÁIYÁT

BY

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DEDICATION

You too have lov'd Him. Fearless, unforlorn,
You pluck'd his blossom and stripp'd off his thorn;
The courage of his lone, unshackl'd Heart
You know, and dare his noble, piteous Scorn.

We have outliv'd the Rosebud, not the Rose,
The Wine of May, but not the Garden Close.
We have known all the pain that Omar knew
And enter'd all the Heaven that Omar knows.

Perchance I 've taught you how Life's rue to quaff
With patient lip, to greet with cheery laugh
The barb that pierces to the inmost soul —
Yet I, my Sáki, I have taught but half;

For when old Edens fade our sadden'd view
And Life is desert, then I start with You
  Singing beside, along the footpath way —
Two Vagrants bound for Paradises new.

Thus will we pass along the sunlit heather,
Bend to Life's tempests and endure all
    weather. —
  And when we reach the Inn that stops
    the Way,
O kindly Host, may we go in together!

CONTENTS

AN ESSAY ON ECCLESIASTES AND THE RUBÁIYÁT 1

ECCLESIASTES IN THE METRE OF OMAR 19

THE PROLOGUE 23

BOOK I: THE EXPERIMENTS OF KOHELETH THE KING 31

BOOK II: THE THOUGHTS OF KOHELETH, THE ONE WHO SPEAKS FOR THE MANY 49

THE EPILOGUE 89

ECCLESIASTES AND THE RUBÁIYÁT

ECCLESIASTES AND THE RUBÁIYÁT *

THE book of Ecclesiastes is not popular. It has furnished few texts for the clergy. As for the laity, they do not read it, and they are rather suspicious of it. It is not alive with biographical movement. It does not glow with evangelical warmth. Its heartiest following, as Professor Genung says, has ever been "from the back seats and the galleries." Its chief attraction seems to be for "the unreconstructed." And yet it is the most modern book in the Bible. For certain inevitable moods it is a distinct tonic, and it has a message for a few souls found in no other Scripture.

Written, as we suppose, in the Persian, or possibly as late as the Greek, period of Palestine's provincial history, the book is absolutely bare of all reference to the priests, the prophets,

* To the editors of *The Biblical World*, in which the substance of this essay appeared, the author is indebted for permission to reprint it.

or the heroes of the Hebrews; it has even an apparent Stoic, Epicurean, and Persian tinge; yet it is thoroughly Hebraic in soul. Its allusions suggest an Alexandrine source — cultured, cosmopolitan, sophisticated; but it has the oriental parallelism and repetitiousness, and its theology and ethics are almost Sadducean. The gap between Ecclesiastes and the earlier Old Testament books is one of spirit as well as of time. It lacks the pharisaic bitterness of Esther and the tenderness of Ruth, the patriotic sternness of Malachi and the penitence of the post-exilic psalms. It is not the voice of the ancient Jew, pastoral, provincial, devoted to the temple and the law, but of the Jew of to-day, the man of business, who has travelled, struggled, suffered, and become disillusioned and careless of orthodoxy. Still, he is the Jew, and the book could have been written by no one but a Jew. Renan regarded it as the only really Jewish book in the canon. Its question is the Hebraic one: What profit? Its purview is Hebraic: only the things that are "under the sun." Its search is introspective, and it is the only subjective book in the Bible except Job.

When we come to compare it with other lit-

eratures, it is not difficult to find its analogies. Clearly, it falls into the class with Byron, Heine, Pascal, and Omar Khayyám. But among these there are both near and distant kinsmen. Pascal and Byron are misanthropes because of personal grievances. Streane says: "Byron bewails himself." But Koheleth is concerned with the world-sorrow. Heine, a fellow Jew, saw as distinctly as the writer of Ecclesiastes the world's vanity, but he chose to accept it in a spirit more elvish and romantic and less sincere. The Persian Omar, by the alembic of Edward FitzGerald, offers the closest analogies to this Hebrew poet-philosopher. The similitude was first noted by Plumptre only two years after those quatrains had been translated into English, and while yet the name of the translator was unknown. The Hebrew preceded the Persian by more than a thousand years — a little more than the time by which Omar preceded FitzGerald. The author of Ecclesiastes was as near in time to the Roman conquest as the author of the Rubáiyát was to the Anglo-Saxon, but the only world-movements that interested either were upon the arena of the personal soul. The Hebrew must have shocked the Pharisees of

Judæa, as the Persian Sufi, not a Mohammedan, did the Moslems of Khorassan. In Omar we read the heart of the tired-out oriental sensualism; in Koheleth, the weariness of the played-out tragedy of Hebrew nationalism.

The study which the two poets make has the same subject. It is life, "the things that are done under the sun." The approach is really in the modern scientific temper. The view is not that of the idealist, always smiling, vague, voluble; but that of those who will not blink nor be blind, who care nothing for traditions or for authority; "too wise," as John Hay has said, "to be wholly poets, and yet too surely poets to be implacably wise." Omar has been stirred to speak by his scorn of philosophical futilities; but Koheleth is moved rather by social abuses.

Each writes largely in the form of proverbial sayings, disconnected and discursive. This is partly because each is intent on registering all his moods. Neither is at all times to be taken too seriously, any more than are some people who never sit down to write a letter unless they happen to feel homesick. The consistency of either Omar or Koheleth is not in orderliness

of argument, but in the consensus of a life experience. Each veers at times from the haughtiness of a Villiers, who "lives, out of politeness," to the self-consciousness of a Byron, who "bore

> "Through Europe to the Ætolian shore
> The pageant of his bleeding heart."

Yet a vigor of philosophy greater than that of a Villiers or a Byron emerges from these soul journals.

Each assumes a representative capacity in his discussion of the universe. Omar was not a mere writer of wine songs. The fact that he has been called a freethinker, a pantheist, an orthodox Moslem, a Sufi, a *bon vivant*, a man of learning, a politician, a gentle rhapsodist, shows how many-sided was the nature and the thought of him whom Dr. Bjerregaard calls "a Socratic *accoucheur*." The Hebrew title of Ecclesiastes is "Koheleth," a word with a feminine ending from a verb meaning "to gather in assemblies." It is evident that this title is intended to indicate that the author is a spokesman to or for a multitude. Luther translated Koheleth "the Preacher;" Plumptre, "the Teacher;" Genung, "the Counselor." Per-

haps it is even more literal and simple to say, "the one who speaks for the assembly," that is, the representative of the thoughts of many.

Each of these poets dwells upon the unending and apparently purposeless circuit of life from birth to the grave, and of the tiresome repetitions of human experience from age to age. Omar sings: —

"Into this Universe and *Why* not knowing
Nor *Whence*, like Water willy-nilly flowing:
And out of it, as Wind along the Waste,
I know not *Whither*, willy-nilly blowing."

And again: —

"A moment's halt — a momentary Taste
Of being from the Well amid the Waste —
And lo! the phantom Caravan has reached
The nothing it set out from."

And again of the individual life: —

"'T is but a Tent where takes his one Night's rest
A Sultan to the Realms of Death addrest,
The Sultan rises and the dark Ferrâsh
Strikes, and prepares it for another Guest."

This is the very thought with which Ecclesiastes begins.

"Generation goeth, and generation cometh,

while forever the earth abideth. The sun riseth also, and the sun goeth down, and cometh panting back to his place where he riseth. Going to the south, and circling to the north, — circling, circling, goeth the wind, and upon his circuits returneth the wind. . . . All things are labor-weary; no man can describe it. Eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor ear filled with hearing. What hath been is what will be . . . and there is nothing new under the sun." (Genung's translation.)

The conclusion of the vanity of all things, which Ecclesiastes reaches, is that of the Rubáiyát: —

> "And this was all the Harvest that I reaped,
> I came like Water and like Wind I go."

Omar and Koheleth agree that

> "All the Saints and Sages who discuss'd
> Of the two Worlds so wisely — they are thrust
> Like foolish prophets forth,"

and "their mouths are stopt with Dust." Both would "take the Cash and let the Credit go." But Ecclesiastes is a much more austere book than the Rubáiyát. While Koheleth agrees with Omar that "a man hath no better thing under the sun than to eat, and to drink, and to

be merry," yet he does not, like Omar, exalt "wine, the sovereign alchemist." Says Omar:

"Drink, for you know not whence you came nor why:
Drink, for you know not why you go nor where."

"I wonder often what the vintners buy
One half so precious as the stuff they sell."

Neither does the writer of Ecclesiastes share Omar's desire for a loved one beside him "singing in the Wilderness," to remake a paradise. More bitter than death is "Woman, that snare whose heart is a net, whose arms are fetters." Ecclesiastes is strictly a bachelor's book. You may remember that St. Jerome said that it was for middle-aged people, and Schopenhauer that no one can fully appreciate Ecclesiastes until he is seventy. Its sentiment is thus expressed in the tenth chapter:—

XXXVI

"A charmer caught a serpent lithe and young,
Who, while he charm'd her, bit him with her tongue.
What use were his enchantments to her wit,
Or from the Serpent was 't Enchantment sprung?"
Eccl. x. 8 and 11.

Omar's scheme of life is, "Let us drink wine, and loaf in rose gardens with women, and be lazy." But Koheleth's pleasures were, like

those of the typical Jew, undertaken seriously; they were psychological experiments. "Like Goethe," says Plumptre, "he analyzed his voluptuousness and studied his own faculties of enjoyment." Indeed, his goal was not so much pleasure as the faculty of enjoyment, and when he has proved that all is vanity, the paradox is that his wisdom-hunger and its utterance, which he scorns as also vain, have plainly been their own ample reward. This is thoroughly Hebraic, as it is distinctly not Persian.

But why does Ecclesiastes appeal to any one? It is precisely because, like the Rubáiyát, it speaks to men in their questionings. Neither book has any message to the piously omniscient. The deeper one goes into life, the harder he finds it to be patient with ready-made faith. John Morley has spoken of the detestableness of "the complacent religiosity of the prosperous." Thoreau once remarked, "Our sadness is not sad, but our cheap joys." It is of infinite comfort to youth to know that even in the Bible there is a book written by a man who was freely permitted to think.

In the midst of the inexorable, what we want is not explanations, but tenderness. It is mag-

nificent to think that Koheleth had faced all the facts of life without blinking, and found no solution, and yet was not dismayed by them. For it is not true, as Holdheim urges, that "the book begins with nothingness and ends with the fear of God." The Hebrew thinker, like Omar's philosopher,

"Evermore
Came out by the same door wherein he went."

But he had learned, with Tennyson's Ancient Sage, to

"Cleave ever to the sunnier side of doubt,
And cling to Faith beyond the forms of Faith."

The reason why the Rubáiyát has become a fad and almost a religion, and the reason why Ecclesiastes has persisted in the canon, in which it is the only contribution of a skeptic, is because these books "face the Unseen with a cheer." They help us on rainy nights and amid November recollections to make a cheery mastery of fate.

Ecclesiastes consoles us because it throws us back upon the intrinsic interest of the life we are just now living. Stevenson once said, "To believe in immortality is one thing, but it is first needful to believe in life." Omar urges,

"To-morrow's tangle to the winds resign," and cries, "O my heart! thou wilt never penetrate the mystery of the heavens. . . . Resign thyself to make what little paradise thou canst below." So the only heaven Koheleth knows is fulness of life. "He hath put eternity ["a pulsation of the timeless" — Genung] into their heart; yet not so that man findeth out the work that God hath wrought. . . . Wherefore I saw nothing better than that man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion." "Koheleth," says Genung, "instead of waiting for heaven, or getting it built on some crude sensual plan, is making heaven every day, secreting it, as it were."

He who has heaven in his heart does not worry about heaven in his future.

When we come to the thought of God, Ecclesiastes stands in direct contrast to the Rubáiyát. This contrast is heightened by the sardonic twist of FitzGerald's rendering. To Omar, God is "a good Fellow and 't will all be well." This reminds one of Heine's blasphemy, "God will forgive. It is his trade." If his human pottery is askew, says Omar, it must be because "the hand of the Potter"

shook in making him. "The memory of such insolence" man can wash away only by many cups of wine. Yet, like Koheleth, Omar credits God with supreme intelligence: —

"He that toss'd you down into the Field,
He knows about it all — He knows — HE knows."

And in an unfamiliar verse, which Powell translates, we read: —

"Open the Door: the Key is Thine alone,
Show me the Path, only to Thee 't is known!
The idle hands they reach I will not take.
Thine everlasting Arm shall bear me on."

But to Koheleth this supreme intelligence is much more exalted. "God is in heaven, and thou upon earth." He is not known as the Father, even of the nation, as in the prophets. He is the far-ruling One, as in Homer; he is Jove more than Jehovah. The doctrine of Ecclesiastes is the magnificent one of the tranquillity of God. Heine and Omar would scoff at his method of governing the universe, and bid him "man's forgiveness take" for his injustice. Not so Koheleth. God is too high for that. The judgment which he anticipates with eagerness will be as just as it will be all-regard-

ing. With a reverence as sublime as that of Job, he is silent in the presence of that Eternal Tranquillity which none can change and none can interpret. "God is in heaven, and thou upon earth; therefore let thy words be few."

But it is in the way that both approach the great stillness, Death, that each finds the culmination of his song. Omar cries, in a stanza little known, "The Hereafter will fill all hours, and the world is but for a moment. Sell not the Kingdom of Eternity for the sake of a moment." And Koheleth answers, "Remember also thy Creator . . . ere the dust return to earth as it was, and the spirit return unto God who gave it."

Omar does not shrink from the draught of that "Angel of the darker Drink," but rather counts it a shame

> "If the Soul can naked on the Air of Heaven ride,
> In this clay carcase crippled to abide."

It is beneath the night and the moon in his loved garden of roses and vines that he would be laid, where his old comrades pass and repass. Here he expects no resurrection, except as his

dust shall enrich the vintage. Still, in a little-known stanza, he offers this pathetic prayer:—

"Oh, God, I am weary of my own business!
Of my anguish and my empty-handedness!
Even as Thou bringest existence out of non-existence, so take Me from my own non-existence to the glory of Thine existence."

Koheleth has a chaster and more serious view of death. In a garden he, too, faces it, but not in the calm moonlight. Amid the wild rains of spring that "solemn immortal birth on the frontiers, to eyes impenetrable," comes on. With the picture of the tempest of death, he interweaves in that sublime twelfth chapter the most delicate and touching reference to the decay one by one of the parts of the body. His close, like Omar's, is the blind, trustful prayer, "Into Thy hands I commit my spirit." And in what Miss Edith M. Thomas calls "the old, tear-gathering, knell-paced utterances" of the twelfth chapter, "the Hebrew wisdom couplet rises to a majestic tide of world poetry." It is, of course, untranslatable in any medium, but in my closing verses I have preserved and interpreted some of the similitudes.

While the book of Ecclesiastes may reveal to the critic a more or less clear series of studies or surveys of life, it has seemed best in the poem to make only the divisions which impress the casual reader, namely, the Prologue (chapter i, 2–11); the First Book, "The Experiments of Koheleth the King" (chapter i, 12 to the end of chapter ii); the Second Book, "The Thoughts of Koheleth, the One who Speaks for the Many" (chapter iii to chapter xi, 8); the Epilogue (the remainder of the book).

My Prologue, First Book, and Epilogue follow closely the order of the original; but in the Second Book, which includes the portions of the original which are without apparent orderly arrangement, I have made selections only and have created an order of my own.

As the translation shows, the First Book, in which Koheleth assumes the disguise of Solomon, is less serious and conclusive than the Second, in which he speaks deliberately and at times passionately from his own experience. In this latter Book he seems to rest finally upon Life as its own reward and blessedness. I regard the Epilogue, not as a summary of the previous arguments, but rather as a lyric outburst,

in which the poet, still true to his calm philosophy of satisfaction in intrinsic Life, is, in view of death, carried beyond himself, not to the disowning of his own conclusions, but to daring to press them to the portals of the grave, and even beyond. The "Conclusion," whether or not by another hand, is the reaction in prose to the previous question of present duty.

ECCLESIASTES IN THE METRE OF OMAR

THE THEME
VANITY OF VANITIES

Saith Koheleth:
Vanity of Vanities, — all is Vanity.

THE INQUIRY

What Profit hath Man in all his Labours,
Which he laboureth under the sun?

THE PROLOGUE

I

ECCLESIASTES I : 4

Old Time, Man's Warder, crouching at his door,
Gibes at the Generations as they pour
Like footless Cloudheaps driven by shepherd Winds
Through Life's ironbound ravine forevermore.

II

1 : 5, 7

The pilgrim Sun bends bravely to his Quest,
But, breathless, finds at night the selfsame
West.
The River, cradled in the mountains, roars
Seaward, but sleeps at length upon the crest.

III

1 : 6

The Sea that smites the stars with spendthrift
blows
Flings back upon itself in white repose;
The wearied Wind that swoops on cormo-
rant wings
Round and around in tiresome circles goes.

IV

1 : 8–10

Through that same treadmill Circle all things
pour.
Charm'd by the droning bagpipes heard of yore,
The well-worn, whirling figures of the Show
Play to tired eyes their melodrama hoar.

V

I : II

Like snowflakes falling in the unmarking sea,
Like flowers that bloom to fade where no men be,
Like sands that gulph an unremember'd shrine,
So fall, so fade, so fail our Works — and We.

BOOK I

THE EXPERIMENTS OF KOHELETH THE KING

VI

THE QUEST OF PLEASURE
I : 12–18
CF. VII : 6

I, King Koheleth, sent my eager Mind
To make the Eternal Quest. What doth she find?
Hearken! "It is the mad Fool's crackling laugh,
The empty rattle of the aimless Wind."

VII

THE QUEST OF PLEASURE
II : 1, 2, 4
CF. VII : 4

Haste! With the dancing torches' welcome light
The House of Mirth is all aglow to-night.
But warmer is the welcome from within,
And there are smiling eyes that shine more bright.

VIII

THE QUEST OF PLEASURE
II : 8

Hear thou the tinkle of soft-tripping feet
That by the vineyard fountain wait to greet;
Those feet are swifter than the water's flow,
That laughter than the water's plash more
sweet.

IX

THE QUEST OF PLEASURE
II : 3–7

The rounded wine-cups in the firelight shine,
Not rounder than the breasts of those who twine
From cup to shoulder fragrant roses red
And sip from redder lips the ruddy wine.

X

THE QUEST OF PLEASURE
II : 9, 10

Here sit I, King above the gay-deck'd throng,
A lion-Lord 'midst bearded liegemen strong,
A Lover wreath'd with roses and soft arms,
A Bard that leads his people in their song.

XI

THE QUEST OF PLEASURE
II : II

Gallant and Sage, Wisdom with Joy I find.
"'T is mine. 'T is here!" I shouted as I dined.
I woke. I dreamt I drank the royal Grape. —
I quaffed the unfermented, tasteless Wind.

XII

THE QUEST OF PLEASURE
II : II

Outside the torches flicker'd in the rain,
The breeze sigh'd out its immemorial pain,
The bubbles burst beside the fountain's brink,
The leaves were falling. And the World was vain.

XIII

THE QUEST OF WISDOM
II : 12, 13, 16
CF. IX : 5

I visited the Sage of reverend fame
And thoughtful left more burden'd than I came.
I went—and ere I left his humble door
The busy World had quite forgot his name.

XIV

THE QUEST OF WISDOM
II : 14–16
CF. VIII : 10 ; IX : 2

So to the Fool's gay tent I next repair'd
Which with his wench and witless brood he shar'd
In low and senseless sports: yet happier he
Whom too the World knew not — he never car'd.

XV

THE QUEST OF LABOUR
II : 17, 18, 21

So with men's Labours as their Fame. With skill
The clay is moulded to the potter's will.
He dies. His wares are set upon the shelf
And to his children all his works are nil.

XVI

THE QUEST OF LABOUR
II : 18–20
CF. V : 13–17

So thought I of myself. I shape the State
As doth the artisan his vase or plate.
My princes squabble o'er my scarce clos'd tomb
And crowns and platters have an equal fate.

XVII

THE QUEST OF LABOUR
II : 21
CF. IV : 13

The sluggard heir enjoys fair fortunes' glow
And Princes all earth's unearn'd treasures know,
But favour's breasts feel cold to palsied arms,
Crowns come too late to brows o'er-thatch'd with snow.*

* *My impression is that I have borrowed this line, but I cannot recall its source.*

XVIII

THE FAILURE AND THE SOLACE
II : 17 AND 22, 23

So — once again — the Schools I cast from mind
And no whit better than the fools I find.
The King's gay ballad and his bondslave's groan
Die in like echoes on the heedless Wind.

XIX

THE FAILURE AND THE SOLACE
II : 24
CF. V : 18

And yet — tho' Life have many a trap and slip, —
Here laughs my board with Food and Fellowship,
Beckon the Bedawin camp-fires on the Road,
And at its end a sweet and rosy lip.

XX

THE FAILURE AND THE SOLACE
II : 25, 26
CF. V : 19

Hail, then! ye Joys that gladden tho' ye fly.
Praise be to Him who sends them flitting by.
Maybe they are not worth my eager Quest, —
Yet who enjoys them any more than I!

XXI

THE FAILURE AND THE SOLACE
I : 12

Thus spake I, and remember'd him, the Wise,
Whose hoary beard streams down the centuries
And wraps him in his royal tomb, where he
Still gauntly dreams, face toward the silent skies.

BOOK II

THE THOUGHTS OF KOHELETH, THE ONE WHO SPEAKS FOR THE MANY

XXII

OF TIME
III : 1–8

I mus'd of Time and times. As years befall,
The shadow of the transient broods o'er all:
Minstrels and Monarchs, Codes and Creeds
and Gods,
Mattock and Sceptre, the Birth-robe and the
Pall.

XXIII

OF TIME
III : 9, 10, 12–15
CF VI : 7

To eat, to drink — this seems the better part;
To love the shop, the ship, the mall, the mart.
  But oh! how bitter in this busy world
To walk with full hands and an empty heart.

XXIV

OF ETERNITY*
III : 11–14

In my own breast beats on Eternity.
No mirage towers of Dreamlands yet to be,
But — once I bent to taste an upland spring *
And, bending, heard it whisper of its Sea.

* "The splendour of the end must already lie prophetic in the strength of the hidden springs."
JOHN FRANKLIN GENUNG, *Words of Koheleth*, p. 51.

XXV

* OF ETERNITY
III : 22

I shape it not from perishable clay,
Nor muse on clouds and hope to make them
stay,
But as the patient shell secretes the pearl
So I secrete my Heaven from day to day.

XXVI

OF ETERNITY
VIII : 8

Give me no Manna for a starveling Life
Nor Sun Delaying for a half lost strife.
Grant me but light to see my foeman's face—
Then shrill above my pain the battle fife.

XXVII

OF A CROOKED WORLD
IX : 3

Life is a plain whereon men fight for bread.
The grain no more is golden — it is red.
Madmen are they, who, knowing not they're mad,
March, jostling close the still heaps of the Dead.

XXVIII

OF A CROOKED WORLD
X : 19

Wine is pour'd out to souls for God who call,
Feasts are spread forth for lives that faint and fall,
Music is offer'd when the heart is dead —
And Money is the answer to it all!

XXIX

OF A CROOKED WORLD
V: 11, 12

One gathereth silver in a shining heap.
How swift his harpy-friends upon him leap.
The wealthy Sluggard hath his splendid Day,
The Workman better, he hath Night—and
Sleep.

XXX

OF A CROOKED WORLD
V : 13–17

Riches are nimble. Ay, and take their flight.
Heavy thy hand? Thy son's grasp shall be
light.
Naked thou camest from thy mother's womb,
Naked thou goest to Earth's Womb of Night.

XXXI

OF A CROOKED WORLD
IV : 1–3

Ever the poor and tender are opprest,
Tyrants have power and wrong is not redrèst,
But they who lie in the cool Grave—ah, none
Can snatch their treasures. Yea, their lot is best.

XXXII

OF A CROOKED WORLD
IX : 2 AND 6

The Lordling Crowd that flaunted in the sun,
The Poor who skulking to their toil have gone,
Their love, their hate, their envy all have chill'd,
And all alike have found Oblivion.

XXXIII

OF A CROOKED WORLD
VIII : 8
CF. XI : 8

My Spirit gladdens in the sunshine bright,
My busy Spirit that finds its work so light,
  But flits away when flits my fleeting breath.—
Ah! dearly lov'd and wholly fickle Sprite!

XXXIV

OF WOMAN
IV : 7–12

Traveller alone, I watch thy stalwart form,
But where art thou when falls the icy storm?
  But Two can guard each other's vagrant feet
And 'midst wild Winter lie together warm.

XXXV

OF WOMAN
VII : 26–28

Yet, of all Vanity to which man 's prone,
Is any vainer thing than Woman known ?
Amongst a thousand Men a single Friend;
Amongst all women I have found not one.

XXXVI

OF WOMAN
X : 8 AND 11

A charmer caught a serpent lithe and young,
Who, while he charm'd her, bit him with her tongue.
What use were his enchantments to her wit,
Or from the Serpent was 't Enchantment sprung?

XXXVII

OF WOMAN
VI : 9

Better the pebbly footpath than the mire,
Better one's own cloak than a neighbor's fire,
  Better the vision of clear-sighted eyes
Than all the wander-lure of wild Desire.

XXXVIII

OF THE INTRINSIC MAN
IV : 14–16

Forth from a Prison came I up to reign
The folk who throng, like bees, upon the plain.
I 'll spend my Furlough like a King forsooth,
Until remanded to my Prison again.

XXXIX

OF THE INTRINSIC MAN
VI : 3, 4

For not with lawless fists I 'll beat the sky,
Nor seem like an untimely birth to die ;
  I will as royal rule my Garden Plot
As He who tills the Star Plot spread on high.

XL

OF THE INTRINSIC MAN
V : 8

Perchance in some dim Cloister Vale of Sleep
These throbbing griefs we 'll learn to bury deep,
And, looking up into the Gardener's Face,
Our ancient Joys find He 's thought sweet to keep.

XLI

OF THE INTRINSIC MAN
VIII : 12, 13

Perhaps, if we but scorn the beastly Crew
That grow and fatten on the ill they do,
We 'll wake to find our Sleep at length is past,
And, waking, learn that all our Dreams are true.

XLII

OF GOD
IX : 17

Oft have I dream'd upon my lonely throne,
Whose noisy cares ne'er leave my heart alone,
  Of the dear Kingdom of encloister'd Thought,
And I have wept to claim it as my own.

XLIII

OF GOD
VIII : 2, 3
CF. V : 1

Silent I pace the Shrine and hear within
The vows of Fools, the Levites' empty din.
Above, the silent Stars reproachful pass,
And stainless kneel the voiceless Seraphin.

XLIV

OF GOD
V : 1

If Moses-like before the Face divine
On Sinai tops my knees do not incline,
  One flicker from that generous Light may
    fall
To cause my patient, puzzled face to shine:

XLV

OF GOD
CF. DEUT. XXXIV : 5–7

That Light which with its plaintive sunset grace
Through triple-tinted veil of Holy Place
  Jehovah gave on Nebo's slope to light
The grimness of the Ten Commandment face.

XLVI

OF GOD
III : 22

"Bold," let men say, "he was, and aye hath striven
Royal to act with all that he was given,
He filled with splendour his brief Day of Life,
And dying made no brokerage with Heaven."

XLVII

OF GOD
III : 22
CF. II : 9, 12, 13.

Would I exchange this Wisdom-Hunger, though,
For all the easy calm of Those-who-know?
Or barter the wild surges of my soul
For ordered throbbings of a heart in tow?

XLVIII

OF GOD
V : 1, 2

Yet, Kings and Subjects do like shadows flit
Before the awful Throne where He doth sit.
From Earth's flat sieve we fall like desert sand.
Who knows if He above regardeth it?

XLIX

OF GOD
VIII : 17
V : 1–7

We kneel and fall before His shadow'd Sill.*
The very hinges with our yearnings thrill.
Our soundest knowledge is, "We know Him not,"†
Our safest eloquence is, "Peace! be still."

* "The insuperable Threshold." — JAMES SHIRLEY.

† "Our soundest knowledge is to know that we know Him not as indeed He is, neither can know Him, and our safest eloquence concerning Him is our silence."

RICHARD HOOKER, *Ecclesiastical Polity*, I, 2, § 3.

L

OF GOD
IX : I

He moves along His lone, eternal Path.
Little behooves our pleasure or our wrath.
One makes or mars — at Even hath he found
The Puppets and the Bagpipes all he hath.

LI

OF FULNESS OF LIFE
V: 18, 19

Cease, then, to wreak a profit from thy task.
Believe 't is good and in its sunlight bask.
Enjoy the food and drink it makes thee crave;
Thy work thy Heaven; what needst thou further ask?

LII

OF FULNESS OF LIFE
XI : 4, 6

Not by the shifting winds sow thou thy seed,
Nor look to rainfalls for thy harvests' meed.
Fame and full hands fill not the heart that craves
The inner Glory of a stainless deed.

LIII

OF FULNESS OF LIFE
V : 20

Above the endless Fury, Fever, Fret,
Above the grief of suns that rose and set,
The Silent One answers my ceaseless Quest
When I have learn'd one lesson — to forget.

LIV

OF FULNESS OF LIFE
IX : 2–6

For if thou seekest further, thou shalt err.
If with the good and great thou dost confer,
Or ravin with the beasts, 't is all the same:
He giveth to all one boon — a Sepulchre.

LV

OF FULNESS OF LIFE
IX : 7, 8

So go thy way in garments white to dine,
And with rare ointments make thy visage shine.
Forget the Door of which He holds the Key,
But not the one which holds thy cherish'd wine.

LVI

OF FULNESS OF LIFE
IX : 7

"Drink! since to-morrow life may all be o'er?"
Nay, drink because to-morrow may bring more.
The Voice may speak from out the brooding
cloud,
A message waft us from the Silent Shore.

LVII

OF FULNESS OF LIFE
IX : 9

And seek to prove Life's solace year by year
With One whom thy fond heart may find most
dear.
Her will may be the wind's will, yet to thee
The home-bound breeze that brings the Haven
near.

LVIII

OF FULNESS OF LIFE
IV : 6

She never has the Eternal Puzzle guesst.
A portion has she borne ; nor sought the Quest.
Ah ! but the heaven of her patient arms,
Her little palms' soft hollows full of rest !

LIX

OF FULNESS OF LIFE
IX : 9, 10

So shalt thou find at length a maid that 's kind,
A gladsome task well suited to thy mind;
And stop thine ears to the mad Fool's crackling laugh,
And never listen to the homeless Wind.

THE EPILOGUE

LX

xi : 9

And Thou, dear Lad, whose bright, enchanted
gaze
Makes all thou seest shine in June's soft haze,
The Summer tarries thine expectant feet,
The paths thou treadest all are rose-strewn
ways.

LXI

XI : 7, 8, 10

Gladsome to see the Sun, the Light so sweet,
Remember! Youth and Dawn have flying feet.
Quick! for their dew is mounting to the sun.
Roses of sky and lip are frail as sweet.

LXII

XII : 1

Take Thou Life's Chalice sparkling to the brim
And, humbly kneeling, give thy thanks to Him.
Drink! for thy just accounting draweth near.
Drink! then step forth into the Silence dim.

LXIII

XII : 2

Or ever — Fate alone may tell how soon —
The Shape of Darkness make midnight of
noon,
The demon Storm Wraith gulp the small,
brave stars,
The flashing Cloud Rack blot the timorous
moon.

LXIV

xii : 3

Then, while the bending rose-trees all are shorn,
The poppies naked in the cool, wet morn,
The lawless winds shall herd the pitiless rains,
The muttering clouds from the cold North return.

LXV

XII : 3

Before that blast thy keepers prone shall lie,
Thy watchmen vainly for their safety fly,
The wrinkled grinding-women at the corn
Crouch o'er their task with hoarse and muffled
cry.

LXVI

xii : 3, 4

The vapid peerers at the window-case
Shall cease — the reticent shutters blown in
place —
The silent doors shall shut the loud street
out,
The grinders stop — the mill grind low apace.

LXVII

XII : 4, 5

The merry dancing-girls with terror quail,
Song sinks to silence and Desire doth fail,
When pounds the roaring Tempest at thy door
And awful Death rides by upon the gale.

LXVIII

XII : 4, 5

Rise now, O Soul — 't is time for Thee to go.
The morning lark is calling thee, and lo!
E'en as it calls, it soars athwart the storm
And helpless hangs against the blackening Woe.

LXIX

XII : 5

So Man unto his House Eternal goes.
The portals once for entrance ope — then close.
Along the sodden street the mourners trudge —
But what is done behind those Doors — who knows?

LXX

xii : 6

Parted the silver Lamp Chain, and its Bowl
Shatter'd before the Shrine has lost its Soul,
The broken Pitcher lies beside the Fount,
The Well Wheel rusts above its empty hole.

54448

LXXI

XII : 7

See! Where the roses fall in Autumn's Gust,
Men to Earth's Treasure Vaults thy Gift entrust.
Thou camest here thyself a Rose-from-Heaven,
Thou goest back, an ounce of perfum'd Dust.

LXXII

XII : 7

Yet — tho' the Dust to brother-Dust be prest,
What of the Bird that dared the awful Quest?
Doth it still flutter on a homeless wing,
Or in the Hand that sent it forth find rest?

THE THEME REITERATED
VANITY OF VANITIES

Saith Koheleth:
All is Vanity.

The End of the Matter; this heard, all is heard:
Fear God, and keep His Commandments,
For this is the Sum of Manhood.

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